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ABSTRACT

A conference set the stage for the development of European Community (EC) policy in the field of vocational guidance and possible action. Discussion focused on the need for trans-frontier guidance and the need for communication and cooperation between guidance services to support educational and occupational mobility across the EC as a whole. The implications of the EC as a single labor market were debated. Participants agreed unanimously that a handbook on vocational information and guidance within the 12 Member States should be developed. Initial suggestions were made as to which bodies might be members of a network designated to produce the handbook. A report of a feasibility study on such a handbook proposed two alternative models: a single handbook and 12 handbooks, one for each Member State. Training and staff development were discussed. Two possible forms for a "European academy" for counselor training were suggested: a single institution and networking among training agencies. Computer systems were suggested to enable comprehensive, current information on educational, training, and employment opportunities to be made available across the EC. Three related issues concerned development of databases, development of computer-aided career guidance systems, and integration of these systems. (YLB)

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CONFERENCE ON EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

27-28 November 1990, CEDEFOP, Berlin

- SUMMARY REPORT - *

1. The conference. The conference was attended by 38 participants, most of them being representatives from relevant government departments in each Member State, together with a number of independent experts in the field of vocational guidance.

2. The major aim of the conference was to set the stage for the development of Community policy in the field of vocational guidance, and to focus on the scope and boundaries of possible Community action, taking account of the principle of subsidiarity. In particular, it was envisaged that the first steps would be taken towards the establishment of a Community network of guidance services, which could serve as an instrument for the practical implementation of specific recommendations.

3. Ernst Piehl (Director, CEDEFOP) emphasised the close collaboration between the Commission and CEDEFOP especially in the field of guidance. The conference was designed both as an expression of this collaboration, and as a basis for future collaborative work.

4. The need. The discussion focused on two distinct though related topics:

   (a) The need for bilateral communication and co-operation between local guidance services in border areas where, in effect, local labour markets cross national boundaries. A report prepared by Peter Plant for CEDEFOP on trans-frontier guidance was presented to the conference.

(*) A full conference report is in preparation

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(b) The need for communication and co-operation between guidance services at national, regional and local levels in support of educational and occupational mobility across the Community as a whole.

5. Regarding para. 4(b), some reservations were noted by Nicola Fiore (Ministero del Lavoro e della Providenza Sociale, Italy) and other speakers about whether the Single European Market implied a single labour market. It was recognised that most people would continue to make their educational and occupational decisions within national, regional or - in many cases - local boundaries. It was also noted that there could in some cases be political resistance to mobility, even within national boundaries: a topical example was in Germany, where since reunification there had been concerns about encouraging too many highly skilled people to move from the east of the country to the west. At the same time, it was pointed out that the general levels of educational and occupational mobility within the Community, particularly at higher skill levels, were likely to increase:

(a) Many obstacles to such movement were gradually being removed.

(b) Programmes like ERASMUS and PETRA were designed positively to encourage mobility among students and trainees.

(c) Many companies operating at a European-wide level would seek to encourage mobility among their staff.

It was also recognised that it was the responsibility of guidance services to make information on the full range of opportunities available to their clients.

6. All guidance services would accordingly need to be ready to respond to increasing requests for information on opportunities in other Member States. Some such requests might come from their own nationals seeking to move to other Member States, whether temporarily or permanently; some might come from nationals from other Member States (or their children) seeking to return to their country of origin.

7. The advent of the Single European Market in January 1993 provided a temporal imperative - referred to by one participant as a "time-bomb" - for a strategy designed to develop responses to such demands. At the same time, Paul Gormley and Rita Veiga da Cunha (EC Commission) presented the proposals for the new extended PETRA programme, with its separate guidance strand, designed to "introduce a European dimension into the systems and processes of vocational information and guidance". This provided a possible focus and an important funding mechanism for

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such a strategy - though links with other Community programmes, including the new FORCE programme, would also need to be developed and maintained.

8. It was generally agreed therefore that the discussions which had taken place over recent years about the need for greater communication and co-operation between guidance services in different Member States now needed to be converted into positive action. A forum for taking firm steps in this direction would be provided by the official meeting on vocational guidance which had been called by the Directors of Vocational Training in the Member States. This meeting should be held in Luxembourg on 24-25 January 1991. It was suggested that the governmental representatives present should seek to identify who was to represent their Member State at the Luxembourg meeting, and to ensure that these representatives were fully briefed on the discussions and outcomes of the present meeting.

9. The handbook. It was unanimously agreed that a concrete and practical first step would be to develop a handbook on vocational information and guidance within the twelve Member States, to include general information on educational, vocational, social and economic matters, as well as contact addresses. The report of a feasibility study on such a handbook, carried out by Volker Koditz for the German Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, was presented to the conference. It was agreed that its production would provide an excellent common task, which should be feasible in terms of currently available resources, and would result in a product that would be of considerable immediate value. The network required to produce it could also be a base for possible further initiatives.

10. In a tour de table, the representatives of each Member State made initial suggestions as to which bodies might be the most appropriate members of such a network. The nature of these bodies varied between Member States, and included:

    (a) A central agency.

    (b) A specified local guidance service acting on behalf of all guidance services in the country concerned.

    (c) A partnership between the two main ministries responsible for guidance services.

    It was noted that it was important for each member of the Community network to act not just on its own behalf but as the representative of a national network covering the full range of services within its boundaries. While such national networks were already well-established in some Member States, in others

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their establishment might itself be a valuable outcome from the European initiative, with possible spin-off benefits.

11. The feasibility study report presented two alternative models for developing the proposed handbook:

    (a) A single handbook, produced by a central editing team, working with nominated national correspondents in each Member States. The result could then be translated into the other official languages of the Community to enable it to be made available in other Member States.

    (b) Twelve handbooks, each produced by national editing teams within the respective Member States. Each team would draw up a specification of the information it required from the other Member States and would provide reciprocal information on an exchange basis.

    It was suggested that (a) might be the most apposite model for the first edition, though this should not pre-empt the possibility of moving towards (b) for future editions. The Commission should nominate appropriate experts to co-ordinate and support the national correspondents and to carry the work forward. It was emphasised that the first edition should be produced as quickly as possible, so that it could be tested against practical needs within guidance services at a local level: deficiencies and possible extensions could then be defined, and made good in future editions. CEDEFOP will give technical support to this project.

12. It was suggested that it would be helpful if the handbook could be developed in electronic data form. This would facilitate updating. It would also mean that discs could where appropriate be made available alongside, or instead of, hard-copy versions.

13. It was proposed by Dr Manfred Leve (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, Germany) that it would be helpful if the handbook could be based on a common definition of "vocational guidance". It was suggested that such a definition might focus on help in choosing and changing an occupation, including information on vocational training and on educational choices which had vocational implications, and also including placement into training and into employment. It was noted that it was important for the definition to include educational choices, since in some Member States efforts had been made to embed guidance services more firmly into the educational system. It was also pointed out that concerns for equal opportunities in access to opportunities required interventions from an early age.

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14. There was some discussion about whether the handbook should be aimed only at those concerned with the guidance of young trainees and workers between compulsory schooling and age 25 (the PETRA target-group) or whether it should also be aimed at those involved in guidance of other young people - including those in higher education - and of adults. It was suggested that it should be framed as widely as possible. Regarding higher education, it was noted that it would valuable to co-ordinate work on the handbook with the parallel handbook being developed by FEDORA (the Forum Européen de l'Orientation Académique).

15. Training and staff development. It was recognised that the handbook was only a first step in developing more effective communication and co-operation between Member States, and that steps also needed to be taken to develop a "Euro-dimension" in the initial and in-service training of guidance counsellors. Indeed, this was important if the handbook itself was to be used extensively and in an active way.

16. The notion of a "European academy" for counsellor training was suggested. This could take one of at least two different forms:

    (a) An institution in a single physical location, drawing students from all Member States for short periods during their training programmes.

    (b) Networking between training agencies within each Member States.

17. In addition, it was noted that study-visits, exchanges etc. were of considerable value. It was suggested that those going on such visits might be required or invited to comment on the relevant section of the handbook, suggesting amendments and additions in the light of their experiences.

18. E. Retuerto de la Torre (Deputy Director, CEDEFOP) announced that CEDEFOP was planning to carry out a project on studying the occupational profiles of counsellors in the Member States, and to develop proposals for training modules incorporating a "Euro-dimension".

19. Computer systems. It was suggested by Tony Watts that in the medium and long term, computer systems would provide a powerful means of enabling comprehensive and up-to-date information on educational, training and employment opportunities to be made available across the Community. Consideration of such systems should take account of three distinct though related issues:

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(a) The development of databases of opportunities in a form in which they could be made available across the Community. An initial demonstration product along these lines - ROMeo II - was shown to the conference. It brought together databases of courses in three specific fields of vocational education and training from eight different Member States. A "front-end" search facility had been developed and made available in the seven languages of the eight participants: the records themselves could then be searched, though only in their original language.

(b) The development of computer-aided careers guidance systems, which not only included databases of opportunities but also helped individuals in self-assessment and/or in making and implementing decisions.

(c) The effective integration of these systems into careers guidance services, in ways which recognised both the strengths and the limitations of such systems.

20. It was suggested that the role of the Commission in this area might be at one or more of four levels:

(a) Encouraging networking, of the kind already initiated through the European Conferences on Computers in Careers Guidance held in Brussels (1985) and Cambridge (1989).

(b) Providing technical assistance and financial support to Member States which had not already developed their own system.

(c) Encouraging forms of partnership between groups of Member States to exploit possibilities which would be beyond the resources of individual Member States - e.g. comprehensive learning systems like the UK PROSPECT system, and applications of videodisc technology and artificial intelligence.

(d) Developing an EC computer-aided careers guidance system.

21. It was reported that the German Bundesanstalt für Arbeit was planning in 1992 to organise a Third European Conference on Computers in Careers Guidance. In the meantime, a working group was to be set up to identify the key issues for the conference and to encourage more active forms of collaboration. This might provide an appropriate mechanism for developing concrete proposals for future Community action in this area.

22. Further suggestions. It was suggested that every two years, on a rotation basis, a conference on relevant themes could be

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held by the guidance authorities in one of the Member States. Such conferences should be for guidance practitioners and managers, and could complement the official meetings of the kind being initiated at Luxembourg (see para. 8). The Commission should also support appropriate trans-national guidance studies and innovative collaborative projects, not least through the new extended PETRA programme. The conferences could, inter alia, be mechanisms for disseminating the results of such studies and projects.

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